

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

WHAT WE CAN DO TOGETHER

By John Dehlin



In July 2007, the Sunstone board of directors hired John Dehlin as the foundation's new executive director. In this role, John will lead out in implementing specific strategic initiatives to solidify Sunstone as the leading independent forum for open, thoughtful, and constructive discussions of Mormon experience and contemporary issues and bring these discussions to even more audiences—and in new ways. Dan Wotherspoon, who has been doubling as editor of SUNSTONE magazine and the foundation's executive director for the past six years, will continue as magazine editor.

John brings to Sunstone a wealth of experience promoting open discussions of Mormon ideas and experience. He is the founder of the Mormon Stories podcast, a popular Internet radio show exploring Mormon-related issues and themes through personal experiences and stories. He is also the founder of Mormon Matters, a weekly podcast in roundtable format that discusses Mormon news in the broader context of religion and society. He has also served as a member of the Sunstone board of directors for the past two years.

John worked in the computer and technology industry for fourteen years, including stints at Bain & Company and Arthur Andersen, and seven years at Microsoft. John is currently serving as the director of the OpenCourseWare Consortium for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

John served an LDS mission to Guatemala, graduated from BYU in political science (1993), and is completing a master's degree in instructional technology at Utah State University. John is married to Margaret Weber Dehlin, and they are the parents of four children.

I CANNOT ADEQUATELY express how excited I am to come aboard in this new position. I come to Sunstone as one who has benefited tremendously from its influence. A few years ago, I was called as an early morning seminary teacher and began studying LDS church history in earnest. After six months of study, much of my spiritual and religious life began to fall apart. While family and church leaders were not equipped to help me through this crisis, the people of Sunstone were. As I delved into the writings and speeches of people such as Leonard Arrington, Eugene and Charlotte England, Richard Poll, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Lowell Bennion, Bill Bradshaw, Ted Lyon, Margaret Young, Darius Gray, Bonner Ritchie, Claudia Bushman, and others, I found a way to navigate through the turbulent waters—towards a place of healing, and even growth. In so many ways, my family and I owe Sunstone a great deal for “being there” in a time of religious and spiritual crisis. I am deeply honored to be able to “pay forward” the gift of

Sunstone through this new position.

For the past two years, it has been my distinct pleasure to work directly with the Sunstone staff and board of directors. As I have come to see how dedicated and passionate these people are about advancing the Sunstone mission, I feel an incredible sense of gratitude to each of them. In particular, getting to know and working with Dan Wotherspoon has been one of the great blessings of my professional life. I could not be more excited to team with Dan, the rest of the staff, the board, and all of you to take Sunstone into new and exciting directions.

As we have strategized about the future of Sunstone, it has become clear that our biggest priority by far needs to be reaching out to a larger audience in new and innovative ways. Presently, both magazine subscriptions and symposium attendance are in slight decline, and we are under many of the same pressures other print publications are facing. While to some degree we see this dynamic as cyclical, we are in the process of kicking off

several new initiatives which, with your help, will allow Sunstone to have broader appeal and impact:

- **SUNSTONE digitization.** Just as *Dialogue* has recently digitized all its past issues, we are in the process of digitizing every SUNSTONE magazine issue for electronic distribution. As we complete this project, we envision making these issues available on the Internet, as well as in CD or DVD form. We are confident that this will represent a low-cost way to ensure that the rich treasure of past SUNSTONE articles are enjoyed for generations to come.

- **Website redesign.** While the Sunstone website has played an important role over the past several years, it is definitely due for an overhaul. Recently the entire library of past Sunstone symposium presentations was converted to downloadable MP3s. As we complete the magazine digitization project mentioned above, we envision redesigning the site in a way to greatly simplify the finding and sharing of our rich library of magazine articles and audio presentations for current and future generations. We also plan to enhance our web presence with expanded podcasts and other features to build greater community.

- **Increased emphasis on contemporary issues.** As we contemplate ways to expand Sunstone's audience, focusing our magazine and symposium content even more on the most important issues affecting Mormons in their day-to-day lives seems appropriate. Among the topics which we hope to cover in the coming two years are:

- *The Spirituality of the Rising Generation.*

Where and how are twenty- and thirty-somethings finding spiritual fulfillment? Do the lives and experiences of Mormon youth match national trends? Where are today's LDS youth turning to fill their spiritual needs?

- *Addiction and Recovery.* What is the LDS Church doing to help those struggling with various types of addiction? What works, and what doesn't? What are the best spiritual approaches to recovery?

- *Body Image among Mormons.* To what extent are issues such as fitness, diet, eating disorders, obesity, and even plastic surgery prevalent among Mormons? What can we learn from professional counselors or those who have overcome struggles in this regard?

- *Effects of technology on Mormon life and experience.* What impacts have blogging,

podcasting, text-messaging, and social software such as YouTube and Facebook had on LDS and family life? How have new multi-media technologies changed the way the Church—and its critics and apologists—spread their messages?

- *The Mormon Soldier Experience*. Exploring the lives of LDS soldiers and their families serving in active combat in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

- *Mormonism and Politics*. What can we learn from the participation and influence of Latter-day Saints within U.S. politics? This discussion would expand beyond Mitt Romney to include Harry Reid, other Mormon congressmen, executive and legislative staffers, the judicial branch, and other government workers.

Others:

- *Mormonism and the environment*
- *Finding value in scripture regardless of historicity*
- *LDS theology and practices regarding disabilities*
- *How has “raising the bar” affected LDS missionary experience?*

- **Mormon Studies for the Masses.** While Mormon studies journals have been publishing a wealth of scholarship over the past thirty-plus years, most of the basic findings have yet to penetrate the minds of average Latter-day Saints, let alone the general public. While the Church and apologetic groups have begun addressing these issues online—along with a plethora of “anti-Mormon” resources now available—there is no balanced source for people to learn the “basic facts” about these important issues (e.g., polygamy, folk magic, blacks and the priesthood, Book of Mormon translation). We believe that Sunstone is uniquely posi-



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tioned to fill this void and will look to provide:

- Framing articles on the main issues within Mormon studies
- An online topical directory which includes not only these summary articles but also a listing of the best scholarly articles on each of these topics (for additional in-depth study)
- Multimedia offerings (e.g., DVDs, Youtube videos) to make these information resources available in a wide variety of formats.

- **Video Histories.** Many of you know that Helen Whitney (filmmaker, *The Mormons*, which aired this spring on PBS) spent thousands of hours interviewing more than one hundred of the most interesting scholars and personalities within Mormonism. Unfortunately, Helen does not own the rights to this footage, and based on inquiries to WGBH (the film’s main sponsor), there are currently no plans to make it available to the public. At Sunstone, we have already begun the process of sitting down with major Mormon scholars and personalities and capturing their stories and expertise on digital video. Over time, we intend to make these interviews available not only online (in places such as Youtube), but also as raw footage for use by future documentarians and researchers.

- **Regional Sunstone Communities and More Symposiums.** Many Sunstone participants have expressed a desire to get together with other subscribers and supporters in their local areas of residence. To facilitate these requests, Sunstone has begun setting up email groups in a few major cities, universities, and countries, including New York, Atlanta, Chicago, Phoenix, Houston, Portland, Seattle, Washington D.C., Raleigh N.C., Boston, several Utah and California cities and universities, Alaska, and the U.K. We envision creating other groups as well. *Subscribe to a local Sunstone community near you: SUNSTONEONLINE.COM/COMMUNITIES. If there isn't a community near you, please email your request to FEEDBACK@SUNSTONEONLINE.COM.*

We are also eager to find a way to increase the number of regional Sunstone symposiums held each year and soon hope to add

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into our rotation cities in the U.S. midwest and south, as well as New York City, Portland, Washington D.C., and the U.K., with others to come.

- **Staying connected through email.** We have set up two email newsletters designed to help you stay connected with Sunstone projects and events. The first, “Sunstone Newsblast,” is a monthly letter featuring announcements about upcoming symposiums, magazine issues, podcasts and videocasts, as well as links to Mormon goings-on that we sense you’ll be interested in. The second, “Sunstone: Anxiously Engaged,” is designed for volunteers and others who are interested in helping with projects and working with us to strategize about Sunstone’s future. Please sign up for one or both of these newsletters at SUNSTONEONLINE.COM/NEWSLETTER.

WHILE we are very excited about the promise of these initiatives, we will not be able to succeed without your support! To make substantive progress, we are looking for various types of supporters, including subject matter experts, writers, organizers, and financiers.

If any of these topics or projects are particularly close to your heart, please contact us at FEEDBACK@SUNSTONEONLINE.COM. We would love to partner with you to make this vision a reality!